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BAUCUS SEEKS SOLUTIONS TO DRUG SHORTAGES TO IMPROVE CARE

Finance Committee Hearing Examines Causes behind Increase in Drug Shortages

Washington, DC – At a Finance Committee hearing held today, Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) examined the causes of drug shortages, how they impact patients and discussed what steps must be taken to achieve a solution. In recent years, drug shortages have begun to inhibit care in hospitals and physician offices across the country, and drugs commonly used in emergency rooms and for cancer treatment have been particularly affected.

“The number of drugs and patients affected by shortages over the past several years has grown at an alarming rate. These drug shortages are affecting some of the sickest and most vulnerable Americans,” Baucus said. **“We have a responsibility to ensure that Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries – and all Americans – have access to the care they need.”**

According to a recent study, there were 211 drug shortages in 2010, up from 58 shortages in 2004. More than half a million cancer patients were affected by drug shortages last year. Low-cost effective generic drugs – critical to many patients struggling to make ends meet during tough economic times – have been hit hard by the shortages. And many experts expect this problem to continue, or even worsen.

At the hearing, Baucus and the witnesses discussed the forces driving the recent, increasingly-common drug shortages. They include quality control issues, delays in manufacturing, disruptions in the supply of raw materials and changes in the prices of drugs. Baucus asked what role Medicare and Medicaid, which pay for over \$26 billion in prescription drugs each year, can play in a solution.

Video and testimony from today’s hearing are available on the Finance Committee’s website at <http://finance.senate.gov/hearings/>.

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